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Abstract
During the second half of 1997 the Illawarra Branch of the Australian Society for the Study of Labour History met twice. The first meeting, on Sunday 17 August, was addressed by Dr Bob James, former president of the Hunter Branch of the Labour History Society, with about twenty members present. The title of this forum was THE TRAGEDY OF LABOUR HISTORY. RESURRECTING THE ROLE OF FREEMASONS AND FRIENDLY SOCIETIES. Bob argued that the decline of the organised labour movement was inevitable, since it was built on a falsified history which gave primacy to unions and political parties, even though many more workers belonged to the masons and friendly societies. His paper, which was enthusiastically received, has been reproduced in this issue.
EDITORIAL

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The August meeting also received a report from Neville Arrowsmith who chairs the Labour Heritage Sub-Committee, which was formed as a result of an earlier talk in May from Terry Irving and Lucy Taksa concerning the Labour Heritage Register. The sub-committee includes Shirley Nixon, Sally Quilter and Gary Turner. It has been active in identifying sites of labour heritage, collecting various artifacts and communicating with local organisations with a view to identifying and preserving items of labour heritage. It is anticipated that the sub-committee will play an active part in preparations for the 1999 National Labour History Conference in Wollongong. With this largely in mind, Sally Quilter also presented a report of her investigations with Shirley Nixon of possibilities for a labour heritage walk as part of the conference. We will keep you posted concerning this and the 1999 conference.

Sally and Neville have also been contributors to much of the rest of this issue of Unity. Apart from his piece on cooperatives, Neville contributed the miner’s song and the poem. The article on the Co-op goes part way to redressing the balance of labour history away from only unions and political parties, and towards the broader range of workers’ organisational experiences. Sally wrote the report on the 1997 National Labour History Conference in Perth in October, which was also attended by Val Dolan, Jim
Hagan, and myself from this branch. Jim Hagan delivered a paper with Rob Castle and Craig Clothier (from the University of Wollongong) on ‘Wage Fixing for Aborigines in the Northern Territory Cattle Industry, 1911–65’, and I gave a paper on ‘The Historical Determination of Collective Labour Institutions in the Former Centrally-Planned Economies in Eastern Europe’.

We finished 1997 on a relatively quiet note with a small Christmas dinner. However, we had a very successful year in maintaining most of our members, in gaining the honour of holding the 1999 National Labour History Conference in Wollongong, in making a mark for ourselves by participating in events outside the region, and in broadening the range of our activities and interests, as indicated by the Labour Heritage Sub-Committee and the greater diversity of contents in this Unity.

We can look forward to a busy year, with:

- forums planned on ‘Looking Forward to the Past – Understanding the Crisis of Maritime Labour Through History’, and ‘Women in Labor’;
- organising for the 1999 National Labour History Conference – all offers of help gratefully received;
- identifying and preserving regional labour heritage – all suggestions gratefully received by Neville Arrowsmith;
- a book launch of Rowan Cahill’s Sea Change. An Essay in Maritime Labour History – Rowan is a branch member from Bowral, and order forms are included in this issue of Unity.

**PLEASE KEEP SENDING MATERIAL IN TO US FOR PUBLICATION IN UNITY,**

including articles, poems, photographs, and reminiscences (we will be publishing a reminiscence from Bob Heggen in our next issue).

**PLEASE RENEW YOUR MEMBERSHIP**

forms in this issue.

*Ray Markey*